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## Aristotle's Generic Being

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*For presentation at the meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy  
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Aristotle begins *Metaphysics* Γ with a bold assertion: there is a science that contemplates being *qua* being and what belongs to it *per se* (1003a21-22). The claim is bold because according to the requirements that Aristotle sets out for a science in *Posterior Analytics* and according to a persistent strand of argument in *Metaphysics* B, there ought not to be such a science. Simply stated, the reason is that one science knows one genus, the subject matter of this science, metaphysics, is all beings, but being is not a genus. That there is a science of metaphysics is a dramatic claim, and metaphysics is the only science that investigates its own existence. The argument for why metaphysics exists is long and detailed. Most scholars suppose it has been told many times—so many times that nothing new could possibly remain. I think essential details have been entirely missed and that Aristotle's argument is generally misunderstood, but the text is too complex to do it justice in a brief paper.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I focus on a small but significant part of the argument here, the generic character of being.

Why does Aristotle insist that one science knows one genus? The idea is that a genus is a common nature shared by its instances, and it is in respect of this nature that an attribute belongs to these instances. That is to say, the generic nature functions as the middle term in respect of which *per se* attributes belong to instances of the genus.

Being is not a genus because there is no nature that is common to all beings. The reason is easy to see. Start with two distinct beings. If they have a common nature, then they will also share any attributes that belong in respect of that nature. They differ only in respect of their accidents. But what if all these accidents had the same nature? They would not differ from the initial beings, nor would the initial beings differ from each other because all their "accidents" are now the same. Suppose, then, that there is a nature common to *all* beings. These beings could only differ from each other by their accidents, but their accidents are also beings that differ only in their accidents, and so on. In short, there is no accident that could distinguish one being from another because all accidents are equally beings. The accidents would share the nature common to all beings. Hence, all would be alike, not only in their natures, but in the natures of their accidents. We could not distinguish between the nature and its "accident" because both alike would be beings. The point here is that if we try to imagine all beings having a common nature, we find ourselves unable to say anything else about them than that they are, for whatever other character we ascribed to all things would also be a being.

Suppose, though, that a thing were not only a being, but also something else, say, a color. We might think that a color would differ from something that was, say, a being and a quantity. But how will we distinguish color and quantity from each other and from being? We need to find two characters that are not beings, but clearly this is impossible. There is nothing that is not a being and, so, nothing that could distinguish one being from another.

Aristotle makes this argument by asking whether being is a genus. In order to distinguish types of being, it would be necessary to differentiate this genus, but the differentia must lie outside the genus because an instance of the genus will not be able to distinguish one being from another—the instance does not make something else differ in its being. Of course, we could imagine all beings having a common generic character while different beings had different specific characters, as if being were a genus that had species. However, the problem here would be finding a way to distinguish one species of

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1. For a detailed discussion of this argument as well as the subject of the present paper, see my *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: Books A-A* (Las Vegas, Nev.: Parmenides Press, 2009).

being from another. We need a differentia. It cannot be *in* the genus. It is clear that we could not divide being into kinds if all beings were the same: there would be nothing to divide it because there is nothing that is not a being.

All this is to show the difficulty of conceiving of characters that are common to all beings. This is why it is so surprising that Aristotle claims that there is, after all, a science of being. Since he never gives up the idea that one science treats one genus (e.g., Γ.2.1003b19-20), being must be a genus of some sort. Aristotle's claim that being is *pros hen* is the essential premise for showing the generic character of being. He reasons: there is a science of a *kath' hen*, a *pros hen* is a kind of *kath' hen*; therefore, there is a science of a *pros hen* (1003b11-16). More specifically: healthy is a *pros hen*, and there is a science of the healthy; hence, it is possible for a science to know a *pros hen*. The import of the argument is obscured by Aristotle's speaking of *kath' hen* here instead of genus, but there is no doubt that a *kath' hen* is a genus. The phrase refers to the one character in respect of which each instance of the genus is said. In the *pros hen* genus, the one character is not common to all the instances, but the character to which all instances are related.

So, being is a genus of some sort, and therefore the object of a science. The text is straightforward, and Aristotle refers to being as a "genus" (1004b22).<sup>2</sup> But nearly all readers have spoken of being as a *pros hen* that is beyond the bounds of a genus.<sup>3</sup> The question I want to pursue here is whether it makes a difference to say that being is a genus. Or, rather, what I want to show here is that it does indeed make a difference.

Let's begin with the standard question about the meaning of "being *qua* being": does this phrase refer to the whole of being or to some proper part of being, namely, *ousia*? This chestnut has been so thoroughly discussed<sup>4</sup> that it seems almost inconceivable that anyone could say anything new—a notion that I shall put to rest shortly. Let us begin by noting that, at first glance, there is strong support for both answers. Since metaphysics is the highest science, the science that knows all beings to the extent possible, it must include within its scope all of being. On the other hand, since metaphysics is the science

2. Aristotle cannot be speaking of the genus of *ousia* in this passage because his point is that sophists treat being without discussing *ousia*. Another place where "genus" has a broader sense than usual is 1005a1-2's claim that one and many are genera of contraries.

3. There are other passages where Aristotle uses "genus" to refer to a class that is well beyond a categorical genus. At I.4.1055b26-29, as well as at Γ.2, 1004b33-1005a2, for example, he suggests that one and many are the genera of the contraries, after having claimed that there is a primary contrariety in each categorical genus.

4. Those who identify "being *qua* being" as being include: Auguste Mansion, "L'Objet de la Science Philosophique Suprême d'après Aristote, *Métaphysique*, E, 1," in *Mélanges de Philosophie Grecque Offerts à Mgr. Diès par ses Élèves, ses Collègues, et ses Amis* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1956), 156–57; W. D. Ross, ed., *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958), I, 251; Günther Patzig, "Theology and Ontology in Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'," in *Articles on Aristotle: 3. Metaphysics*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji, trans. Jennifer Barnes and Jonathan Barnes (London: Duckworth, 1979), 33–49; Pierre Aubenque, *Le Problème de l'Être chez Aristote: Essai sur la Problématique Aristotélicienne*, Bibliothèque de Philosophie Contemporaine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 35–36; Christopher Kirwan, ed. and trans., *Aristotle's Metaphysics: Books Γ, Δ, and E*, 2nd ed., Clarendon Aristotle Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 77. On the other side are: Asclepius, in *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libros A-Z Commentaria*, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca (Berlin: George Reimer, 1888), 225.14–17; Albert Schwegler, trans. and ed., *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles: Grundtext, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, vol. 4 v. in 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1960; rpt. of 1847–48 ed.), III, 152; P. Natorp, "Thema und Disposition der Aristotelischen Metaphysik," *Philosophische Monatshefte* 24 (1888): 37; Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian 'Metaphysics': A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 267; Philip Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 160–220, esp. 161–62 [also on this issue: Philip Merlan, "o!n h!f o!n und prw&th ou)si/a: Postskript zu einer Besprechung," *Philosophische Rundschau* 7 (1957): 148–53; and Philip Merlan, "On the Terms 'Metaphysics' and 'Being *qua* Being'," *Monist* 52 (1968): 174–94]; and Giovanni Reale, *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 144–45.

of first principles, and *ousia* is the first principle, it is clear that metaphysics is principally a science of *ousia* and that it knows other beings through them. Hence, being *qua* being should be *ousia*.

Recently, it has become popular to say that the phrase “*qua* being” is adverbial and used mostly with a verb for know or study.<sup>5</sup> The assumption is that whereas many sciences study the same subject, being, only metaphysics studies this subject “*qua* being.” It is inferred that the phrase describes how metaphysics is to study being and that it, therefore, does not limit the scope of being.

This is one of those arguments that, despite being repeated frequently, is transparently mistaken. In *Metaphysics* K.4, Aristotle contrasts metaphysics with physics: physics studies being *qua* motion. It is obvious that not all beings move, and that physics is only concerned with that part of being that does move, sensible *ousiai*. Likewise, mathematics studies being *qua* quantity, but this is another way of saying that mathematics studies quantity.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it is true only “in a way” that metaphysics, physics, and mathematics treat the same subject, being, in different ways. More properly, each treats its own proper subject.<sup>7</sup> So, it is simply wrong to reason that “*qua* being” does not restrict the scope of being because it is adverbial. The most we can say is that “*qua* being” need not restrict the scope of being.

The other side does not fare much better. The thought here is that being *qua* being is *ousia* and the science that treats “being *qua* being and what belongs to it *per se*” treats *ousia* and all the other categories. This is consistent with *Categories* 2 where Aristotle claims that everything else is present in or said of *ousia*. So by treating *ousia* and what belongs to it, Aristotle can treat all beings. However, there is an obvious problem here: the other categories do not belong to *ousia per se*. They are often called the “accidental categories.” In fact, Aristotle makes clear what the *per se* attributes of being *qua* being are at the end of  $\Gamma$ .2: contrary, complete, one, being,<sup>8</sup> same, other, prior, posterior, genus, species, whole, and part (1005a11-18). All these are treated in book  $\Delta$ ; and this book is not a “dictionary,” as it is usually called, but a treatment of attributes. Quality, quantity, and relation also appear in  $\Delta$  (in chps. 13-15), but Aristotle includes senses of each of them that extend well beyond the categorial genera they usually denote, senses that allow them to be attributes of all beings.<sup>9</sup>

There is another problem here. Aristotle is claiming that everything, *ousia* and all that belongs to it, can be known, somehow, by metaphysics; but the *accidents* of *ousia* cannot be known by the science that treats it, any more than the accidents of triangles are known by geometry. It is not enough to include accidents in the scope of the science that treats an *ousia*.<sup>10</sup> The task of metaphysics requires not just

5. This view was enunciated by Auguste Mansion, “Philosophie Première, Philosophie Seconde et *Métaphysique* chez Aristote,” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 56 (1958): 217. It has since been endorsed by Christopher Kirwan, *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Books  $\Gamma$ ,  $\Delta$ , and  $E$* , Clarendon Aristotle Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 77, Jonathan Lear, “Aristotle's Philosophy of Mathematics,” *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 168–69, Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 25–26, and many others.

6. At one point, Aristotle says that arithmetic treats man *qua* indivisible and the geometer treats man *qua* solid (M.3.1078a21-26). However, his point is that although mathematical objects are not separate, mathematicians treat them as if they were separate and are justified in doing so. Hence, to treat man *qua* solid is to treat a geometric solid. Again, the arithmetician and geometer have the same subject, the man, only “in a way”; more properly, each treats its own proper subject, discrete or continuous quantity.

7. *De Anima* A.1.402a11-22 suggests that each science studies some *ousia* with a method that is proper to it. Numbers and surfaces are examples of such *ousiai*; that is to say, they are treated by the sciences that study them as if they were *ousiai*.

8. The inclusion of being in the list of attributes might seem inappropriate especially to those who identify “being *qua* being” as being or a way of treating being. We can recall that Aristotle includes a thing's genus among its *per se* attributes (*An. Po.* A.4.73a34-37).

9. The discussions of what appear to be categories, namely, quantity, quality, and relation in  $\Delta$ .13-15 are much broader than the comparable chapters of the *Categories*. For example, the differentia is one of the things called “quality,” and Aristotle's examples are differentiae of man, horse, and circle (1020a33-b1). Here, “quality” characterizes *ousiai* and quantity, and it would characterize every being with an essence.

10.  $\Delta$ .30.1025a30-34 claims that “accident” can mean essential attribute. Other categories are not “accidents” of *ousia* in this sense.

including all beings in its scope but also being able to know them. And it is obviously unclear that beings can be known: think only of Plato's denials of such knowledge of what he calls "becoming" and Aristotle includes under "being." What metaphysics really needs to show is that there can be sciences not only of zoology, but of color, music, and the senses.

In short, being *qua* being cannot in its initial usage in  $\Gamma.1$ , refer to either *ousia* or being simpliciter. Fortunately, we have a clue about what it means in the *Posterior Analytics*. There Aristotle speaks of triangle *qua* triangle and what belongs to it: he means what belongs to triangles in virtue of their essence. When, accordingly, he mentions being *qua* being, he must mean what belongs to being in virtue of its essence. It all seems straightforward, but wait: can being have an essence? This is where we need to recall the earlier argument that a *pros hen* is a kind of *kath' hen*. The latter is the single nature that is the essence of a genus. Being has no such single nature, but *ousia* is, in a way, common to all beings. So we can say that the essence of being is *ousia* or, more perspicuously, the essence of being is essence or, alternatively, the *ousia* of being is *ousia*.

It would, seem, then, that being *qua* being is, again, *ousia*. But that depends on what *ousia* means, and Aristotle is notoriously elusive about meanings, despite his careful attempts to distinguish senses of terms. A triangle can have an essence, as Aristotle confirms later in the *Metaphysics*. That's why it makes sense to talk about the essence or even *ousia* of a triangle. The essence of being is the same. It is something that every being has.

What does all this mean? To call something a being is not to say anything in particular about it. Aristotle's point is that all beings also have essences: to be is to be something. Often ascribed to Aristotle, this notion is, I am suggesting, the very point Aristotle is making, the crucial claim that allows there to be a treatment of all beings that does not reduce to knowledge of a single character.

Again, my proposal here is that the *ousia* to which all beings are related is not the categorical genus of *ousia*—not, at least, here in this passage—but simply essence. And the point is not that all beings are or are related to a *single* essence, but that all beings are related to *some* essence. Aristotle's description of the ways that things are related to *ousia* fits much better with this broad understanding of *ousia* than with the categorical genus of *ousia*. Consider what is related to *ousia*:

For some are said to be beings because they are *ousiai*, others because they are affections of *ousiai*, and others because they are ways into *ousiai*, or corruptions, or privations, or qualities, or productive or generative of *ousiai* or of what is said in relation to *ousiai*, or else denials of any of these or of *ousiai*. Therefore, even what is not we say to be what is not (1003b6-10).

It is an essence or form that, as we know from the *Physics* (B.1), comes to be in a matter or is corrupted, and not just the essence of a nature, but that of a quality or of another category (*Phys.*  $\Gamma.1$ ). Everything mentioned here is related to essence rather than to categorical *ousia*. Indeed, only two of the items our passage mentions as related to *ousiai* even *could* be other categories, the qualities and affections of *ousia*. But both are discussed in book  $\Delta$ , in chapters 14 and 21, respectively, where Aristotle treats them more broadly than categorical genera. Most of the other relations to *ousiai* mentioned here are also treated in  $\Delta$ : privations and denials are types of opposites that appear in  $\Delta.10$  (also in  $\Delta.22$ ), and he alludes to corruptions and generations in this chapter (10.1018a20-22) and to the ways into *ousiai* in the discussion of prior and posterior in the next (11.1018b19-21). Finally, the false is discussed in  $\Delta.29$ . In short, what is related to the *ousia* of any being is discussed in book  $\Delta$ . Indeed, reading  $\Gamma.2$ 's description of the ways things are related to *ousia*, a casual reader would never suppose that Aristotle was speaking about other categories' relation to the category of *ousia* in 1003b5-10.<sup>11</sup> His emphasis is the way any *ousia* comes to be and ceases to be.

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11. Christopher Shields, *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Oxford Aristotle Studies (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press, 1999), 217–67, interprets being as a relation of categories (he terms it a “core-dependent homonym”) and argues at length that Aristotle did not defend this character of being that those he have attempted to do so on his behalf have been unsuccessful. Shields thinks the doctrine false because he understands it as asserting degrees of existence.

There is another passage here that is consistent with the notion that essence is the character common to all beings. Aristotle famously declares that whatever is is also one because being and one make clear the same “*nature*” (1003b22-25). The nature that they make clear is the essence that is and is one. This nature is not confined to the categorial genus of *ousia*; *every* being has a nature. This nature is its essence.

On the other hand, because *every* being has a nature or an essence, it may seem wrong to say being is a *pros hen*, for this would mean that some things are called “beings” because they are *ousiai* and other things because they are merely *related* to *ousiai*. Someone might object: (1) If every being is an *ousia*, then what comes under the heading of being related to *ousia*, but not being *ousia*? Moreover, (2) this account of being is scarcely consistent with Aristotle’s emphasis on the categorial genus of *ousia* in the central books and in book  $\Lambda$ .

These two objections are easily answered, but there is another objection that I cannot address here. As for (2), in the first chapter of book Z, Aristotle emphasizes the dependence of the other categories on *ousia*. Categorial *ousia* is prior in formula, knowledge, and time. In particular, the formula of *ousia* is present in the formulae of each of the other categories. So the essences of other categories depend on the essence of *ousia*. Thus, *ousia* does stand in some sort of *pros hen* relation with other categories. The issue for us is not the truth of the standard interpretation, but whether it is what Aristotle is claiming in  $\Gamma$ .2. The striking difference in the way this latter chapter expresses the priority of *ousia* suggests it is not making the same point as Z.1. Moreover, Z.1 is casually assuming the point I think  $\Gamma$ .2 is making: that each being *has* an essence. The other objection (1) was: if being *qua* being is the essence that *each* being has, how could there be beings related to *ousia* and how could there be *per se* attributes of beings? I think that Aristotle is answering this question when he describes what is related to beings as a path into *ousia*, a destruction of *ousia*, and a privation of *ousia*. All these are defined through the essence. They are in some very broad sense negations of essence. The point is that what has an essence is a being, but that its having an essence requires some process of acquisition and, ultimately, a process of loss, neither of which is identical with essence and both of which are understood in terms of the essence. (Indeed, something’s having an essence becomes meaningful because it must acquire and lose that essence.) A negation of essence is itself an essence and thus counts as a being. Hence, what belongs to being *per se* is not something that is other than being—there is nothing besides being. What belongs to being *per se* is rather what depends on essence. We could gather this from Aristotle’s examples of *per se* attributes of being: same, contrariety, being, one, and so forth. These characters do not belong exclusively to one genus. They do not fall under one category because they do not have a particular categorial nature of their own. Yet, all of them depend on essences. They are, I think, the reason that Aristotle adds that even what is not also, in some way, is; for to the extent that they negate essences, they are not; but in negating essence, they are defined through it, and therefore are.

It is evident that the doctrine of being I am ascribing to Aristotle is not easy. In contrast, the notions that being *qua* being is simply being and, alternatively, that it is categorial *ousia* are both relatively simple. It would be better if I could argue for my interpretation through its simplicity. Moreover, although there is scarcely any text in Aristotle’s corpus that has been discussed more than the opening of *Metaphysics*  $\Gamma$ , I am proposing an interpretation that has not been seriously considered in the extant literature. Hence, I find myself in the uncomfortable position of trying to convince you that the proper understanding of being *qua* being is more difficult and complex than what you have learned elsewhere. In a way, my task here is impossible because, if I am right, then being is just barely intelligible.

I suggest that this last criticism really counts in my favor. It has generally been assumed that Aristotle’s account of being will be transparently intelligible. But why should it be? Being is at the lowest rung of reality—it is just barely the object of science and, as such, it *should be* barely intelligible. My understanding of being *qua* being makes clear the limited intelligibility of being and allows for the possibility of attributes of the sort Aristotle describes in  $\Gamma$ .2 and book  $\Lambda$ . Being is the object of a science that seeks to know that it has an essence, and the essence that being has enables it to be known. Only this is an essence that is not a real essence, but something that is more like a similarity or analogy. The type

of intelligibility I am ascribing to being is not adequate, but for this very reason, when we try to grasp it more carefully, we are led to higher causes.

Aristotle treats being as some sort of genus, I have been arguing. What is the advantage of calling it a genus? On the two alternative views, being is not a genus. Because a *pros hen* extends beyond a genus, and because the only thing that Aristotle describes beyond the genus is analogy, it is plausible to assume that being is some sort of analogy. This is Thomas Aquinas' move. Aristotle talks about analogy as a similarity in relation; it requires *four* terms ( $\Delta$ .6.1016b34-35). Aquinas invents another kind of analogy that he ascribes to Aristotle. Instead of a similarity in relation, it consists of a similarity of term; thus, when two things are related to one term, even though the relation be dissimilar, they are analogous. This relation between *three* terms has come to be called the "analogy of attribution."

Aquinas is concerned with privations because he assumes that being is a positive character, an act. In my view, the real challenge for Aristotle is not a privation like blindness but a denial like not-sighted. Blindness is an attribute of animals that is known through its genus; not-sighted includes not only what could have sight but plants, rocks, chairs, sweet, and loud—all of which are beings in other genera. Not-sighted belongs to every being that is not in some genus; because it spans beings in different categorial genera, there would seem to be no possibility of knowing not-sighted. (Recall that one science [=one knowledge] knows one genus.) But if we cannot grasp not-sighted, then we also cannot know the principle of non-contradiction, the claim that the same thing cannot be sighted and not-sighted in the same way, at the same time, etc. Or, rather, the PNC would need to belong to the order of knowing and have no real ontic import. It is here that it becomes important that being is a genus. As Aristotle says, even what is not is a being (1003b10).<sup>12</sup> He goes on to explain that denials are like privations: both are said in respect of something one; either this something is absent simply or it is absent to a genus (1004a13-16). The point is that the one science that knows the something must also know *both* its privation and its denial (1004a10-12). Again, this is possible because the denial is also a way of knowing what is denied. We know the denial as a being from which a particular essence is absent—just as we know blindness as a state of a *genus* or as an individual in a genus who, by nature, should be capable of seeing. Hence, the denial of some nature is the state of *generic* being that is not that nature. The denial can be known because it is a determination of being. Insofar as knowing the PNC depends on knowing denials, the PNC can only be grasped by a science that can treat being as a genus.

I am referring here to very difficult discussions that Aristotle includes in *Metaphysics*  $\Gamma$ .2 in conjunction with the *pros hen* doctrine of being, discussions that are rarely considered. They support very nicely the picture I am painting of being as a genus. Aristotle's being is a kind of super-genus that is further determined into by the categorial genera and their species. This genus has as its essential nature just "to have an essence," precisely the character that is further determined by the specific characters that constitute categorial genera. To be sure, "having an essence" is not a real character that is common to all beings. But it serves as the basis of all science and all further determination of essence.

If being is a genus whose generic character is the essence of each being, then the first question is not how secondary beings are related to primary beings but how there could be secondary beings at all, for all beings have their own essences. The answer is simple: the secondary beings are various sorts of negations of the primary beings. What, after all, is a path into or out of being other than an essence not fully realized and, thus, in some respect negated. As long as being constitutes some sort of *generic* character, the negation of any essence will also belong to the genus. And just as the negation of white in the genus of color is another color, black, so too the negation of some being should always be another instance of the *genus* of being. Now, as a being, black or any other privation, has an essence, and its essence includes its relation to white or that of which it is the privation. So, too, the denial, not-white, also has some sort of essence. The relation of a privation to the essence is essential to what it is, but many denials belong accidentally: it is essential to black not to be white, but accidental to a table or a rock. So, too, of things related to some primary being, some must be understood through it, and others

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12. It is significant here that Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John Patrick Rowan (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1961), IV. L.1:C 539–40, claims that negation exists only in the mind.

can be understood independently of it—or, as the medievals might have put it, beings are not related to primary being exclusively “intrinsically” or exclusively “extrinsically.” Primary being here is not a single real nature, but merely the essence of whatever has an essence. If this is right, to be related to primary being is not to be related to a nature with a single essence. As a result, there is no danger that all being would be a strict *kath’ hen* genus through their relation with primary beings, nor that their relationship with primary being be merely the superficial extrinsic relations.

It is because all beings have essences that all of them can be known in a single science. Just what does that science know? In *Metaphysics* Γ, it does not know very much. It knows that beings can be known. That is important because among being are quantities and colors, objects of the sciences of mathematics and color: we need to know that these latter sciences have objects that can be known. In knowing that beings can be known, metaphysics provides the basis for the particular sciences. For every science has as its subject matter an *ousia* or, as in the case mathematical, what can be treated as an *ousia*. Metaphysics shows that these particular sciences are legitimate. Second, it shows that beings have essential attributes. These attributes include one, difference, contrariety, and the other terms that give us a handle on the generic structure and, thereby, explain the possibility of there being definitions of essences. Third, metaphysics knows the principle of non-contradiction. This is the principle of all knowledge and it depends on and, I have argued, is virtually equivalent to each being’s having an essence and *ousia*. None of this counts as complete knowledge of being, but it is important.

The interpretation of being *qua* being that I have offered here is well-supported by *Metaphysics* Γ, but the real issue is not whether Aristotle said it, but whether it is right. Do things have to have essences? It is worth recalling that, in the Parmenidean world that is probably Aristotle’s target here, there are no individual essences and all is one because no being differs from any other. This is the problem I opened with: if all beings are alike, we could never be in a position to say what their similarity is, nor consequently could we ever have knowledge of them. Knowledge requires differentiations. We need a more refined way to grasp things, and beings must exist with characters more finely delimited than simple being: they must exist with essences. Whether these characters are plants and animals, matter and soul, or the atomic elements and particles is a separate question.

There remains, however, one central difficulty with my analysis here. As I understand it, being *qua* being is not a real character, but the essence that each being has, and these essences are many. If this is right, then being would seem closer to proportionate analogy; so that in arguing against an analogy of attribution, I will end up with something still more problematic. This problem deserves more attention than I can give it here. Let me simply note that Aristotle does discuss a proportionate analogy at some length in conjunction with his discussion of one, and we can learn a lot about *being* by seeing how it differs from one. Aristotle describes the one as a qualitative or quantitative measure in each genus; so it is clear that one differs in each genus and that the term “one” refers collectively to particular ones (I.2). He claims that “the essence of one” (τὸ ἐνὶ ἐῖς) is either some *thing* that is one, that is, an individual or a motion, or it is something “closer to a *word*,” just as “element” could refer to, say, a thing like fire, or more generally to being a constituent (I.1052b5-9). There is nothing in common among all ones. Being is not like this. The essence of being, that is, being *qua* being, is simply essence, I have been arguing, and that is important because it allows being to have the character of a quasi-genus and, thereby, to be treated by one science; that is to say, it allows metaphysics to exist. But every essence contains some reference to the categorial genus of *ousia*. So, any more precise knowledge of essence makes clear the priority of categorial *ousia*, and ultimately sensible *ousiai*’s dependence on immaterial *ousiai*. The issue here is not where the *Metaphysics* ends up, nor is it the dependence of beings on categorial *ousiai*. The issue is, rather, what, in the first instance it means to be, and the answer is that it means to be something, that is, to have an essential nature. In the first instance, before its subsequent refinement, this is what “being *qua* being” means.



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